



Australian Bureau of Statistics

1301.0 - Year Book Australia, 1988

ARCHIVED ISSUE Released at 11:30 AM (CANBERRA TIME) 01/01/1988

This page was updated on 22 Nov 2012 to include the disclaimer below. No other content in this article was affected.

DISCLAIMER:

Users are warned that historic issues of this publication may contain language or views which, reflecting the authors' attitudes or that of the period in which the item was written, may be considered to be inappropriate or offensive today.

AUSTRALIA'S NATIONAL ESTATE

This article has been contributed by the Australian Heritage Commission.

AUSTRALIAN'S CONCERN FOR THEIR ENVIRONMENT

In August 1974 the Government-appointed Committee of Inquiry into the National Estate reported to Federal Parliament that uncontrolled development, economic growth and 'progress' to that time had had a very detrimental effect on Australia's national estate. Its report called for prompt action and public education to prevent further neglect and destruction. The Committee's report was a synthesis of a broad collection of the views and attitudes of Australian citizens towards their environment.

The inquiry received more than 650 submissions - from all levels of government, national trusts and nature conservation organisations, professional associations, trade unions and individuals. Members of the Committee travelled around Australia following up points raised in submissions, holding public meetings and talking to people.

One interesting finding of the inquiry was that Australians across a wide socio-economic range expressed concern for the environment. Conservation emerged as an important issue. To quote a paragraph from the report:

The Conservation of the National Estate is the concern of everyone. The forces which threaten it directly affect the quality of life of the less privileged urban people, whose access to and enjoyment of parkland, coast and natural bushland, of familiar and pleasant urban city-scapes, and sometimes their own dwellings, are endangered. Often it is these less privileged who are initiating and supporting action to preserve the best features of our present way of life...

AUSTRALIAN HERITAGE COMMISSION

On a recommendation of the Committee of Inquiry, the Australian Heritage Commission was established. Its enabling legislation was passed in July 1975 with the support of all political parties.

The Commission's role is to advise the Federal Government on the protection of the national estate. In summary, its responsibilities are to:

- prepare and maintain a register of national estate places;
- advise the Minister of the Arts, Sport, the Environment, Tourism and Territories on all matters relating to the national estate;
- develop policies and programs for research, professional training and public education.

Protecting the national estate

The major work of the Australian Heritage Commission has been the development of the Register of the National Estate.

The term 'national estate', coined by the Welsh architect William Clough Ellis in the 1940s and later used by U.S. President John Kennedy, is a very broad-ranging concept. In the legislation, the national estate is defined as:

... those places, being components of the natural environment of Australia, or the cultural environment of Australia, that have aesthetic, historic, scientific or social significance or other special value for future generations as well as for the present generation.

It thus consists of all those places which have been identified as worth keeping and handing on to future generations. Such places include wildlife habitats, natural ecosystems, landscapes of great beauty, grand buildings and structures, humble dwellings, work places, ruins, sites of historic events and Aboriginal places such as dreaming tracks, rock art sites, ceremonial and archaeological sites. Portable objects, such as paintings and works of art are not included.

Protecting the national estate requires a partnership of government at all levels - Commonwealth, State and local. It also requires the involvement of the voluntary conservation organisations, community groups, educational institutions and individuals.

Places in the Register of the National Estate

In June 1985 there were 7,974 places listed in the Register of the National Estate and another 281 on the interim list. The largest proportion of these places are historic buildings although some of the places listed for their natural significance, for example, national parks, may cover very large areas and may have historic or Aboriginal sites within them. The table shows the current distribution of national estate listed places across Australia.

THE REGISTER OF THE NATIONAL ESTATE AT 30 JUNE 1986

State		Built	Aboriginal	Natural	Total
N.S.W.	Reg. (a)	2,143	125	239	2,507
	IL (b)	47	10	7	64
	Total	2,190	135	246	2,571
Vic.	Reg.	1,303	89	162	1,554
	IL	6	-	-	6
	Total	1,309	89	162	1,560
Qld	Reg.	424	54	205	683
	IL	27	27	8	62
	Total	451	81	213	745

S.A.	Reg.	599	103	288	990
	IL	16	1	12	29
	Total	615	104	300	1,019
W.A.	Reg.	648	38	193	879
	IL	5	7	9	21
	Total	653	45	202	900
Tas.	Reg.	966	21	139	1,126
	IL	3	9	23	35
	Total	969	30	162	1,161
N.T.	Reg.	51	44	43	138
	IL	6	23	9	38
	Total	57	67	52	176
A.C.T	Reg.	53	8	17	78
	IL	23	1	2	26
	Total	76	9	19	104
External Territories	Reg.	5	-	14	19
	IL	-	-	-	-
	Total	5	-	14	19
Totals	Reg.	6,192	482	1,300	7,974
	IL	133	78	70	281
Grand Total		6,325	560	1,370	8,255

(a) Reg.- Registered (includes all places in this status group)
(b) IL - Interim List. (includes all places in this status group)

Most of these listed places fall into one or several of the following categories:

In the natural environment: national parks, nature reserves and other places for the protection of native fauna and flora; the coastline and islands; inland water expanses, rivers, lakes and other wetlands; special landforms, geological features, caves, forests, woodlands, grasslands; areas of scientific interest.

In the cultural environment: Aboriginal rock art sites, ceremonial grounds and sacred sites; Aboriginal quarries and shell mounds, campsites and fishtraps; important historical and archaeological sites (both Aboriginal and European); historic buildings and structures, either individual or in groups; historic towns and precincts.

The better known and more widely accepted National Estate places, like the Great Barrier Reef, Uluru (Ayers Rock), Kosciuszko National Park, the Sydney Harbour Bridge, the Sydney Opera House, the Australian War Memorial, the historic Tasmanian town of Richmond, the cathedrals of Adelaide and the historic port of Fremantle, are found in the national inventory alongside smaller scale and more humble places, like memorial drinking fountains, graveyards and cemeteries, ruins, railway bridges and even historic or Aboriginal carved trees.

There are no gradings between different categories of places and all registrations have the same

status.

The Register of the National Estate is an open-ended inventory. New places can be added to it as they are assessed as having National Estate value. Places can be taken off it if for some reason they lose their value, for example, historic buildings after major modification.

The function of the Register of the National Estate is to provide the basis for the development of programs to identify, protect and enhance the National Estate. It also provides a focus and direction for funding under the Federal Government's National Estate Grants Program. Approximately \$30 million has been allocated since the program was set up.

Although most of the places that would be expected to be found on the Register are now included, the Commission is still receiving a large number of nominations each year.

THE EFFECTS OF LISTING

Under the **Australian Heritage Commission Act 1975**, registration imposes some constraints on the actions of Commonwealth Ministers and authorities. Section 30 of the Act provides that Commonwealth Ministers and agencies must not take any action which would adversely affect any places in the Register unless there is no feasible and prudent alternative, or unless all action is taken to minimise damage where there is no such alternative.

The Commission has no power over the actions of State or local governments or private owners that may affect a place in the Register of the National Estate.

Public education and training for conservation

The Commission has a statutory obligation to heighten awareness of the value of the National Estate, and of issues affecting it.

It is implementing a comprehensive information/education program which includes a wide range of publications, the use of films and television, displays and exhibitions, the running of seminars and workshops to enhance understanding about the National Estate.

The Commission has established contact with voluntary conservation movements and government agencies that have the potential to publicise the national estate, for example, Australia Post, Promotion Australia and the Australian Broadcasting Commission. It also has instigated a number of heritage projects with commercial enterprise.

The World Heritage Convention

In August 1974, Australia became one of the first countries to ratify the International Convention for the Protection of the World Cultural and National Heritage (The World Heritage Convention). This Convention was adopted by the General Assembly of UNESCO in 1972 and came into force in 1975. It has now been signed by more than eighty countries.

The Convention aims to ensure international co-operation for the safeguarding of the globe's irreplaceable heritage. This co-operation is vital in a world with population and energy pressures, technological change and industrialisation, and changing boundaries and economic circumstances.

The World Heritage Convention requires State Parties (i.e. countries who are signatories to the Convention) to adopt general policies, to establish appropriate organisations and services and to develop suitable legal, technical, scientific and financial measures for the protection, conservation and the preservation of their natural and cultural heritage.

State Parties are also required to submit an inventory of property suitable for the World Heritage List. This list is being compiled to ensure that places of 'outstanding universal value' are recognised and protected.

AUSTRALIA'S WORLD HERITAGE PROPERTIES

Six Australian places have been assessed by the World Heritage Committee as being of 'outstanding universal value' and are now inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List.

They are the Great Barrier Reef, the Lord Howe Island Group, Kakadu National Park, the Willandra Lakes Region, the Western Tasmania Wilderness National Parks and the Australian East Coast Temperate and Sub-tropical Rainforest Parks.

These properties now take their place on a list including such places as the Pyramid Fields of Egypt, the Historic Centre of Rome, the Palace and Park of Versailles, Kathmandu Valley, Grand Canyon National Park and the Rock-hewn Church of Ivanovo. Only six of the places have been inscribed for both their cultural and natural significance, three of which are Australian (Kakadu, Willandra and South West Tasmania).

The Great Barrier Reef, a maze of reefs and islands stretching 2,000 kilometres along the Queensland coast and covering some 35 million hectares, is the largest coral reef system in the world and the richest in biological diversity.

The Lord Howe Island Group includes Lord Howe Island, the spectacular Ball's Pyramid, adjacent islets to the south and the Admiralty Islands to the north, and the coral reefs of the area. Its value derives from its unique landform and its diverse and largely intact ecosystems.

The Willandra Lakes Region, covering some 6,000 square kilometres in far western New South Wales, provides outstanding evidence of the antiquity of modern man, of the life and culture of early Aboriginal societies, and an unrivalled record of past environments and landscapes.

Kakadu National Park is of universal significance for its landform, its variety of flora and fauna and its rich legacy of Aboriginal art and occupation sites. The Park is located in the Alligator Rivers Region of Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory and contains extensive wetlands.

The Western Tasmanian Wilderness National Parks cover 770,000 hectares of one of the last great temperate wilderness areas in the world. Archaeological excavations in the area have uncovered evidence that shows humans were occupying the area 20,000 years ago, at the height of the last glaciation.

The Australia East Coast Temperate and Sub-tropical Rainforests Parks are rainforest areas in coastal New South Wales. They include two types of cool temperate rainforest, a major part of Australia's warm temperate rainforest and a sample of sub-tropical rainforest types. The areas show the evolutionary history of rainforest in this part of the world and also provide the habitats for populations of many rare and endangered species.

This page last updated 22 November 2012

© Commonwealth of Australia

All data and other material produced by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) constitutes Commonwealth copyright administered by the ABS. The ABS reserves the right to set out the terms and conditions for the use of such material. Unless otherwise noted, all material on this website – except the ABS logo, the Commonwealth Coat of Arms, and any material protected by a trade mark – is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 2.5 Australia licence